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Homiletics

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THE CIRCUMCISION AND THE NAME OF JESUS

LUKE 4:14-21

THE CHRIST-MISSION

The Context

1. *A Quotation from the Old Testament:* Is. 61:1, 2. The roots of the New Testament are in the Old; the flowering of the Old Testament is in the New. Here Jesus links them indissolubly: "Today," He said, "in your very hearing this text has come true" (v. 21 NEB). The Christ-mission was always "according to the Scriptures."

2. *Its original, historical significance.* The text was Isaiah's word of encouragement to the exiles in Babylon—God's promise of a coming glory for Zion. Frequently repeated: Is. 42:1-9; 49:6. The Babylonian Captivity has become a metaphor for man's exile from God, man's natural state. He is the prodigal son far from his rightful home; the lost sheep away from the security of the sheepfold.

3. *Its position in Luke's Gospel.* The incident in Nazareth is moved up by St. Luke out of its proper chronology (cf. Matt. 13: 54; Mark 6:1) to the beginning of Christ's ministry. Did St. Luke thereby intend it to be the theme of his Gospel and the theme of Christ's mission? Coming as it does in an early chapter, following hard on the temptation in the wilderness, and serving as an illustration for the general statement of Christ's activity "in the power of the Spirit" (vv. 14, 15), this may well have been the evangelist's intention. The text is then a summary of the Christ-mission—also of our mission.

4. *Its significance for this day in the church year.* Jesus' circumcision was an indication of His submission to the Old Testament law: "Think not that I have come to

abolish the Law . . . but to fulfill" (Matt. 5:17). As such He became a child of the Old Covenant (cf. the first two collects for this day) and in His person also linked the two Testaments.

Jesus' given name was an ancient and honored Jewish name: Jeshua or Joshua—"Yahweh is help"—another sign of Christ's prefiguration in the Old, His fulfillment in the New Testament. His name is also a brief summary of His mission: ". . . you shall call His name Jesus: for He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Cf. also Eph. 1:21; Phil. 2:9, 10.

The context is significant and important. It is as though all the Old Testament history had been a gigantic jigsaw puzzle being pieced together in agonizing slowness and perplexity. A pattern seemed to be there and emerging, but it was fuzzy and inconclusive. Then the key piece, Jesus of Nazareth, appeared, and the picture was clear and complete.

This also prefigures the experience of natural man. He gropes and stumbles in the dark until "the dayspring from on high" appears and meaning and purpose is given to his life. Not only had this text "come true in their very hearing," but all of Isaiah's dreams are about to become reality. Jesus will assume the role of the suffering servant of Israel. That which climaxed in the "suffering under Pontius Pilate" is initiated in that ancient ceremony, circumcision. But instead of the "warrior of the Maccabean dream of empire," He came bearing the humble name "Yahweh is help." The King will stoop to conquer. The meek will inherit the earth. Here at the very beginning of His ministry He presents Himself as the "key of David" to unlock the mysteries of the Old Testament. He claims to be the Anointed One (v. 18);

the Messiah, the Christ. His mission will be as follows:

The Text

Isaiah's prophecy uses the language of political exile and imprisonment. As noted, this has become metaphorical for any human oppression: physical, mental, emotional, spiritual. The five * phrases of the text can be subnamed under two major headings: to preach good news to the poor; and, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

I. To Preach Good News to the Poor

The *πτωχοί* (cf. the Beatitudes) are the "crying, crouching beggars." They have nothing. They are nothing. This, as in the Beatitude, does not merely describe their condition but their attitude (Is. 66:2). Recognizing their condition they can only wait for the dispensation of the riches of God. Whether they are captives in Babylon or natural people dead in trespasses and sin — "nothing in my hand I bring." What would be "good news" for such as these?

A. *Deliverance from captivity.* After years of war or oppression with what joy the armies of liberation are received! Christ's mission was to herald (the verb is *κηρύσσω*) — to preach — the good news of a deliverance of the poor in spirit so long held captive by Satan. "Fast bound in Satan's chains I lay," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 387. The Christ-mission includes preaching the Gospel.

B. *Sight for the blind.* The imagery is that of a prisoner blinking in the sun after his release from the dark dungeon. Christ's mission was to bring the light of truth to eyes long clouded by error. "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32). The Christ-mission includes teaching the whole counsel of God.

* The phrase "he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted" in the KJV has long been considered an interpolation in Luke's Gospel. It is found in the original Hebrew and the LXX.

C. *Release from oppression.* This is not a repetition. It refers to the healing process that must follow a long captivity or incarceration. Christ's mission was to release men from the long range aftereffects of their sin and to relieve them from its consequences in the world. The Christ-mission includes healing.

The ministry of Jesus was not confined to man's "spiritual" needs. He came to save man in his totality. His mission was to preach, to teach, and to heal. This He demonstrated so often in His dealings with people, e. g., the healing of the paralytic (Mark 2). He delivered him from the captivity of his sin in forgiving him his sins; He healed him of the illness which is the result of sin; He taught him and the people present by means of this entire incident.

The Christ-mission is at the same time our mission. As this verse from Isaiah was appropriated by Jesus as the theme of His life and ministry, it becomes the charter of our holy ministry and the purpose of the Christian life. The church exists to preach the good news to the poor in spirit that their sins are covered; to teach those who walk in darkness by bringing to them the Light of the world; to heal those bruised by the weight of evil.

(This would make an excellent text for an ordination or an inaugural sermon.)

II. To Proclaim the Acceptable Year of the Lord

The RSV translated the source passage in Isaiah 61 as "the year of the Lord's favor." As such it is generally understood as the 50th or jubilee year described in Leviticus 25. To this phrase Isaiah adds "and the day of vengeance of our God" which, if interpreted as Judgment Day, introduces a jarring note. Linked with the jubilee year, however, it can be understood as a time of general "squaring of all accounts." In Nazareth Jesus either concluded His reading of the text in mid-

verse or else, as in verse 18, Luke is summarizing and mentions only the text on which Christ preached that day.

The thrust is twofold:

A. *Joy.* The jubilee year was a period of gladness, of new beginnings, of rest for land, man, and beast. It was ushered in with a fanfare of trumpets (jubilee comes from the Hebrew word "yobel," meaning "fanfare"). The return of the children of Israel from the Babylonian Captivity would be, and was, a joyous time, a new era (cf. Ezra 3:10-13). So Christ came to inaugurate a new and joyous period in God's dealing with men and in man's history. "Joy to the world, the Lord is come." Note the many references to joy especially in John's Gospel. The Christ-mission is always and in all ways a blessing. Who has a better reason to be happy than the poor in spirit to whom has been given the kingdom of heaven?

B. *Urgency.* The infinite God must always accommodate Himself to man's finitude. Eternal and timeless, He speaks to man in terms of man's segments of time: hour, day, month, year. The contrast is always and persistently there: how short and how fleeting is man and man's time. What must be done must be done with speed. With God there is always and only an eternal *now!* The time to listen to the good news is now. The day of the Lord is now. This is the year of the Lord's favor.

Both these aspects of verse 19 lend themselves to an application to New Year's Day. As Christians we mean something definite and different when we wish someone "Happy New Year."

Summary

Luke 4:14-21 assures us that from the very beginning of His ministry Christ knew who He was, and what He was, and what He had come to do. His mission was to reveal and preach a God of grace to those who needed Him and in the knowledge of their need

would exhibit the humility of spirit to accept Him. The church as the body of Christ "in the power of the same Spirit" has the same mission. This is why the church exists; this is what the church is: to do in its time and place what Christ does in all time and in all places and for all people.

THE SUNDAY AFTER NEW YEAR

THE SIGN OF JONAH MATTHEW 16:1-4

The Context

The text follows the feeding of the 4,000 and precedes Christ's word of warning to the disciples about the "leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" to whom the text had been addressed. A major and public miracle seemed always to rouse His enemies and prompt them to some endeavor, usually futile as in this instance, to entrap Him.

It should be noted that a report of a similar exchange between Jesus and His antagonists is recorded in Matt. 12:28-42. The similarities, however, are fewer than the differences. Pharisees were involved in both instances; a sign was asked of Jesus; He referred both times to "an evil and adulterous generation"; He offered no sign but the sign of Jonah. On the earlier occasion He elaborated on the sign by a reference to the "three days and three nights in the belly of the whale." On the later occasion, when the Sadducees were also present, He made reference to His listeners' ability to read the signs of the weather in the sky, but He did not elaborate on "the sign of Jonah." On the earlier occasion He had gone on to speak of the judgment of Nineveh and the "queen of the South" on the unrepentant generation of His day. None of this is said in the present text. It ends rather abruptly: "So He left them and departed."

The point is that these were two totally different occasions indicating Jesus' fondness for Jonah as a type of which He was the

antitype. Cp. also Mark 8:11-13; Luke 11:29, 32; see also John 2:18; 6:30.

It would seem that that phase of the Jonah story with which our day concerns itself most, the three days and nights in the whale, was incidental in Jesus' use of the incident. The sign of Jonah has other important aspects and lessons for us. Herman Melville in *Moby Dick* has Father Mapple begin his sermon on Jonah: ". . . what depths of soul does Jonah's deep sea line sound!"

The Text

The antagonists are Jesus and the Pharisees and Sadducees. They considered Christ a presumptuous upstart. It is to this opinion that "the sign of Jonah" is directed.

To test Him, in confident expectation that He would fail, they demand of Him "a sign from heaven." A sign is never a word or document; it is a deed like those performed by Moses before Pharaoh, Joshua making the sun stand still, Elijah calling down fire from heaven—or Jonah to Nineveh. A "sign" is the ultimate credential.

Christ responds with irony. They can foretell the weather from signs in the sky. "Red sky at morning, Sailor take warning; Red sky at night, Sailor's delight." But they, leaders in Israel, cannot read the signs presaging Israel's future. They had "Moses and the prophets"; they had the witness of John the Baptist, the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies; they had heard the words and seen the miracles He had performed (the feeding of the 4,000 just the day before), and yet they did not accept Him or believe in Him.

He labels them "an evil and adulterous generation." This is a condemnation of those who should know better. It is never directed against the Gentiles. They cannot forsake God for they never knew Him. The children of Israel do know Him. Hosea 1:2: ". . . for the land commits great harlotry by forsaking the Lord." Thus this text speaks to

us who are in the church; not to those without.

The sign they ask for will be given them but it will be a sign of judgment—the sign of Jonah:

1. Over against their provincialism stands Jonah's mission to Nineveh, to Gentiles, to the hated Assyrian, no less (Jonah 1:2). The God of the Old Testament was always the universal God.

2. Over against their lovelessness and legalism stands the forbearance of the heathen sailors who tried desperately to save Jonah along with themselves (Jonah 1:12-14). Examples of people who were not Israelites in Jesus' day, who put to shame the children of the covenant with their faith and life. The Good Samaritan. The centurion. The Syro-Phoenician woman.

3. Over against their hardness of heart stands the total repentance of Nineveh from king to beast of burden (Jonah 3:6-8). This came about through the preaching of reluctant Jonah; yet this generation had the preaching of John the Baptist and of the Christ. And we have a New Testament and 1,900 years of church history.

4. Over against their rejection of Christ and their apparent victory in His crucifixion and burial stands His Easter triumph, of which Jonah's apparent defeat was the prototype.

The Sermon

By way of introduction reference may be made to the previous Sunday's sermon on Christ's mission leading into the opposition He encountered in carrying forward His ministry as evidenced in the text.

In answer to the obvious question, "What is the sign of Jonah?" it might be well to retell the entire story of this Old Testament book. Most people know only the phase dealing with the great fish, which is really not the point of the story.

After retelling the story, or during its

telling, elaborate on the four points given above.

The greater Jonah has come into our midst. We are still walking in the bright light of His nativity. He is a sign of God's grace for our salvation (Jonah 4:2b). Or shall we become like the first Jonah who, having witnessed the mercy of a gracious God at work, sits petulantly under his withered vine bemoaning his minor personal inconveniences? "So he left them and departed." (Matt. 16:4; cp. Acts 13:46)

Oakland, Calif. WALTER E. KRAEMER

THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD

THE FATHER SAYS THAT JESUS IS GOD

MATTHEW 3:13-17
(See sermon study, p. 802)

Introduction

Merry Epiphany! — that greeting might suggest an overdose of the holiday season. Epiphany reminds us to keep on celebrating Christmas. Rejoice over the Babe in Bethlehem's manger. Let Jesus truly be your God, your Savior, your Redeemer, your New Born King. *Merry Epiphany! The Father says that Jesus is God.*

I. John Misunderstands the Reason for Baptizing Jesus

While John the Baptist is vigorously declaring the message of Christ, the carpenter of Nazareth desires to be baptized. John the Baptist seeks to refuse to baptize Jesus. He needs no repentance. John feels the request ought to be reversed. He has need of being baptized by Jesus. Certainly that was a correct understanding. It is the kind of self-understanding we need today.

II. Jesus Desires to Be Baptized and Fulfill All Righteousness

Jesus says, "We both have a mission to perform. Yours is to prepare the way for the

Messiah, Mine is to be the Messiah." Jesus puts Himself alongside all sinful mankind. Jesus submits to what every sinful human being must submit to. Jesus became "the end of the Law, that everyone who has faith may be justified" (Rom. 10:4). Did Jesus have to be baptized for His sins? No! For us? Yes! He took our place fully, completely, and all the way.

III. The Holy Spirit Testifies of Christ

Jesus is baptized and the heavens are opened. Christ's baptism became a window to heaven. John is assured that Christ is truly the Anointed One. The Spirit of God was the evidence and the convincing proof that Jesus was the One who would lead God's people into the blessed fulfillment of His promises. Nor was this but a momentary evidence of God's saving action in the life of Jesus. In the temptation account Jesus was led by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit still leads to Christ today. Pray that the Holy Spirit, who testified to the work and message of the Christ, might also convince you of that same message, assure you that His work accomplished your salvation, and lead you through your deserts to the fulfillment of all God has promised.

IV. The Father Accepts the Mission of Christ

The full Messianic mission of Jesus is attested by the voice from heaven. This does not mean Jesus now suddenly becomes the Son of God. He had been that from eternity. "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1). The Father is saying in effect, "I am involved. I am in complete harmony with what this Man is doing. I want to express publicly the significance of what has just happened." The Father says, "This is My Son, the eternal Son. This is the Servant the Father elected for the great task." The whole redeeming program of Christ has the blessing of the Father. It will come to a glorious fruition through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Son. All His work has

the divine blessing of the heavenly Father. Jesus knew all of this already but we had to hear it, we had to learn it. The sign the Father gives us is different—but this bread and wine shows us, gives us the Christ.

Conclusion

This is the Epiphany message. That's the reason we say "Merry Epiphany!" Though the Christmas decorations be neatly tucked away for another year, the Christmas carols a memory, the Christmas message rings through ever more clearly this Epiphany Day. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The Holy Ghost attests to it. The Father has said it. His work of redemption is for you. Thank God in Jesus for His salvation. That's the reason we say "Merry Epiphany!"

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

SPFAK UP FOR CHRIST JOHN 1:35-42

Introduction

A child came home from kindergarten with a piece of paper on which were circles and squares. The mother asked if she was learning to count. The girl replied, "These are the seats of the boys and girls in my class. Those marked with an X go to church and those with circles do not." And the mother asked, "How did you find out?" The child replied, "I asked them." Very simple, isn't it? Man's relation to God through Jesus Christ is the most important lesson to be learned in life. If others are to learn this lesson we who know must be unashamed to tell others of the Savior. Our text reminds us that Jesus comes to others through you. For that reason then, *speak up for Christ.*

I. *The Christian Message Centers in Christ*

A. *John the Baptist pointed out the Lamb of God.* John wanted to get the news out. Here was a man on fire for the work of the Lord. John pointed his followers to Christ.

He calls Jesus "the Lamb of God." No doubt the words of Isaiah 53 rang in their minds. They had known of the sacrificial lambs. Now they are led to the Lamb of God. We note the message of John. He doesn't speak about the weather nor about the score of the soccer game in Jerusalem or the exploits of the Roman soldiers. His message is Christ, the Lamb.

B. *People must be led to Christ.* Get a product out and it will sell. Expose it to people. The auto dealer says, "Come and see my car." The realtor, "Come and see my property." Get a product out and it will sell. Jesus also says, "Come and see." Is this what you tell your unchurched friend? Your dying neighbor? Your unchurched date? Do you speak about the latest movie, basketball score last evening, or world news? We ought to be saying, "Come and see. Come and see a manger in Bethlehem. Come and see a cross on Golgotha. Come and see an empty tomb. Come and see the amazed faces of some disciples gazing up into heaven. Come and see Jesus." This is the message.

II. *Follow Jesus for the Right Reasons*

A. *What seek ye?* Jesus does not ask "Who?" but "What?" Jesus wants to make sure of the motive. For what are you seeking? A pain-free existence? A carefree way of life? Heaven on earth? Increase in social standing? Security? Power? A person needs Jesus for the problems of life and death. For the answer to the predicament of being an enemy of God. Christ wants you to come to Him, but for the right reason.

B. *Where dwellest thou?* John and Andrew acknowledge Jesus as "rabbi" or teacher. They were thirsting for knowledge. They wanted to be with Jesus. From 10 in the morning throughout the day, no doubt, they sat at Jesus' feet. All because someone had cared. They were able to learn more of their Savior.

III. *Lead Others to Christ*

A. *Andrew brought Simon to Christ.* Andrew shares Christ with his brother. Love impels one to share the good news. Andrew used no back door approach. There was no beating around the bush, no apologizing for the message. He simply said, "We have found the Messiah which is the Christ." Andrew had learned his lesson well.

B. *Be an Andrew for Christ.* Go out into the fields white unto harvest and share Christ with others. Whom should I ask? A bridge partner? A member of your golf foursome? The one who sits next to you at school? Your customers in your business? Your date? Your neighbor? Your milkman? Mailman? Newsboy? Those in your garden or civic club? Speak up for Christ and get the message out to them.

Conclusion

Why be an Andrew? That's why God has called you into His kingdom. Your lost fellowmen need your testimony. God will help you and you will be glad you spoke up. If your faith is not worth giving away, it's not worth keeping. The more you share, the more you possess. Be an Andrew. Speak up for Christ.

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

GOD'S ANSWER FOR MEN'S LIVES

JOHN 1:43-51

Introduction

Dr. Albert B. Sabin, noted virologist and discoverer of the Sabin vaccine, stated that as he traveled throughout the world he tried to observe what would ease the tensions of this world today. His final conclusion was that every nation and every people must somehow, someday learn how to make friends out of enemies. Dr. Sabin's diagnosis was correct. In God's Word we have that

way for which he was searching. We have the answer. In Jesus Christ God did make friends out of enemies. The task now is to get each person to know this. And the problem is that we often forget it or value it too lightly. Jesus then is God's answer for your life and the lives of all people.

I. *Philip Demonstrated That Jesus Was God in His Life*

A. *Philip shared Christ with his friends.* Philip was a recipient of the all-inclusive call, "Follow me." He knew that Jesus was the Son of Man who had come to seek and to save that which was lost. He found his friend Nathanael and gave him the message of Christ. He knew. He did not forget. He followed through.

Do you love your Jesus so much that you willingly share Christ? Is it important to you or not? What about the evangelism outreach in your congregation? What about the call to go and make visits in the homes of the non-churched? You must share Christ. The love of Christ compels you to do this. If you can forget His love, is it perhaps not real enough in your own life?

B. *Philip's message was, "Come and see."* Philip simply said, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote." These were simple words. The Gospel has always been phrased that way, hasn't it? God so loved the world. The Lord is my Shepherd. He was wounded for our transgressions. She will bear a son and you shall call His name Jesus. Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory. Simple words, yet words that get the job done. Philip's words ask us for a commitment. He didn't say, "Think it over. Talk to your family about it. I will be back in a month." He rather said, "Now, come and see." Come and see Jesus in Bible class. In the pastor's class. In church. In the Scripture. Come and see. It is a message we must hear and heed and then we can tell it to others.

II. *Nathanael's Reaction Demonstrates Men's Responses to Christ*

A. He approached the news with apprehension. Can't you just see Philip all excited? This is his first recorded action after he heeds the call of Jesus to follow Him. The response of Nathanael? "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" It's the same way today. We go and the response returned is, "Not interested. I haven't time. What good is that for me? Can anything good come from a Savior? A criminal on a cross? A baby in swaddling clothes in a manger? From a crown of thorns, a bleeding body?" Others say, "Jesus may be a good man, a good example—but Jesus as God? No."

Since we have experienced that lack of enthusiasm even in our own lives, ought we be surprised? Surely we ought to expect by now the reluctance of the sinner to become involved with God.

B. Nathanael acknowledged Jesus as his teacher. Suppose Philip would have quit. Suppose he would have said, "I'll come back later." Instead Philip continued to encourage Nathanael. And when he came to Jesus, the Lord saw the possibilities. Nathanael was confronted with the message and he too was convinced. He accepted Him as his teacher and not only as teacher. "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Can't you just see Nathanael going to Philip and saying, "I'm thankful that you brought me to this Jesus, that you didn't give up, that you persisted." Do you know a Nathanael in your life? Do you know someone else—besides yourself—whose name is Nathanael?

III. *Jesus Wants to Be God in All Men's Lives*

A. Jesus seeks out His people. Jesus isn't merely a nice man who was once on earth and has since ascended up in the clouds. God is not an impersonal being. Jesus was

(and is) God on earth. He sought out Philip and He seeks us out too. No one can brag about his deserving eternal life. No one can say, "I have come to Jesus by myself." "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16). He comes in His Word in Scripture and sacrament. He comes to you at times that may seem surprising—when you are at the sink, or at the movies, while changing the baby's diapers, or mowing the lawn. Jesus asks, "Follow me," by bringing to your mind all He has done for you, by pointing out all He expects of you. Just as He sought out people when the Father sent Him into the world, so He sends you today to seek out those He has chosen as His people.

B. Jesus knows and fills our every need. Jesus knew what was going on within the heart of Nathanael. He is also our omniscient God. He knows our doubts and our faith, our reluctance and zeal, hesitations and determination. And He who came to fulfill all that Moses and the prophets wrote is able both to forgive and empower. The body and blood with which He saved us from death is given to us in the sacrament to bring us even further along in our living. With Nathanael we must say, "This Jesus is my God." This Jesus of Bethlehem's manger, of the blood-stained cross, this Jesus who knows all things, He is truly my Lord.

C. Jesus gives glory and hope. Nathanael would see greater things. We shall see greater things also—the opening of heaven. Here God is at His best. The heavens open and announce the birth of the Christ. The heavens open and declare Jesus as the Son of God at the baptism, at the transfiguration. The heavens receive Jesus at His ascension. And the heavens shall be opened again and Jesus will come in all majesty and glory. We shall see greater things. And all the living and the dead will see—some in fear and some in joy. But it will be all joy for

those who know that through Jesus Christ God is their Friend.

Conclusion

This is the answer to the problems of today. Planes may fly over Hanoi or Saigon or our town. Threats will continue. Lives will be lost. People will continue to search for answers. They will try to find the common denominator. We have the answer. The answer is simple: let Jesus be God in your life. Through Jesus Christ God made friends out of enemies. He wants that message to get out today. Jesus is God's answer for men's lives.

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD

THE SCRIPTURES BRING CHRIST TO YOU

JOHN 5:39-47

Introduction

How many times did you read your Bible this past week? How many times the comics? How many chapters of the Bible did you study thoroughly? How many pages of the sports section and the figures of the stock page did you peruse thoroughly? We find time to read what we want to read. The editorial, the box score, the Dow-Jones Index—but how hard to read God's Word. The greatness of Christ shines through the prophets and is imparted to us in the Gospels. Jesus comes to us through the Bible. Let the Scriptures bring Christ to you.

I. *What Are You Getting Out of Your Scripture Reading?*

A. *The Jews disbelieved the words of Moses.* Jewish people were users of the Scriptures, taught religion in their schools, appealed to Moses, whose followers they claimed to be. By subtle analysis of each particle and letter of the Old Testament scriptures they not only utterly deceived themselves, but, while rejecting the Messiah,

they were also led away from what Moses was trying to tell them. They heard the voice of the prophets but did not accept it. It sounds strange, doesn't it? These people read and searched the Scriptures, and yet they were getting further away from their true meaning. Is it dangerous to read and search the Scriptures? Pride caused the downfall of these searchers. They approached the scrolls with preconceived ideas. Nothing wrong in searching the Scriptures, but to search them without Christ is tragic. They welcomed the arrogant claims of false prophets, but rejected the One commissioned by the heavenly Father.

B. *People today read and misbelieve.* Can the same thing happen today? Is it possible to search, to find the wrong answers? A seminary professor said that the Scripture searcher can take two views: one, you judge Scripture; two, Scripture judges you. People today still say miracles are foolishness, resurrection of the dead impossible, virgin born baby ridiculous, three-in-one Trinity not only a mathematical impossibility, but totally irrelevant to modern man. But Scriptures still judge men—all men. They reveal our desire "to be like God"; our lack of charity and our judging, mistrustful spirits. Name the symptoms you discern in your heart. And what they say about such people—people such as you and I—is that we are under God's judgment.

II. *Get Christ Out of Your Bible Reading*

A. *The Scriptures testify of Christ.* Jesus said, "The Scriptures bear witness to Me." That's what Epiphany is all about. Jesus, as God, comes to men. Peter, James, and John on the mountaintop were reminded of the testimony of the Scripture through Moses and Elijah. The heavens declared Jesus as the only-begotten Son. All Scripture points to Jesus as the Lamb of God. He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. They tell of His miracles, marvel at His wis-

dom, unfold His compassion. They present the greatest rescue mission in history as they set forth Jesus as the One who comes in the Father's name to rescue the world.

B. Use the Scriptures for Christ. Search them, use them. "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Col. 3:16). Let Him guide the life of the church. Is the Word of Scripture always heard at voters' meetings? Does the voice of Christ run your home and your worship? Do the words of Christ inform your business dealings? Find joy and pleasure in the Lord's will through the Word. When the problems of people or cities pass before our mind's eyes, what is our reaction? Do we seek answers in God's Word or in our emotions? In God's love or in God's justice? Does the Word finally have anything to say to the problems of the day? Use the Scriptures. Be led to the foot of the cross. That Word is working in this service, in this moment, leading us to Christ, Christ's way, Christ's sacrament.

Conclusion

Peter, James, and John had their mountain-top experience on the Mount of Transfiguration. Recognize the Christ and a mountain-top experience of your own as you encounter Jesus in His Word. Let the Scriptures bring Christ to you.

Houston, Tex. DONALD G. BLACK

SERMON STUDY

EPIPHANY

MATTHEW 3:13-17

The narrative of Jesus' baptism is part of a larger unit (3:1—4:16) which reports on the preparations for Jesus' public ministry. Matthew summarizes the ministry of John the Baptist to show how it is tied in with the ministry of Jesus which was to follow. John was to announce Jesus' coming (3:1-12). He came in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, specifically the word of Isaiah

(40:3). His ministry had a wholesome influence on many (3:5, 6), for John preached repentance as the only way to escape from divine wrath. When he confronted those whom he recognized as hypocrites (i. e., Pharisees and Sadducees), he did not spare words in trying to call them to genuine repentance. John was not concerned about personal popularity and acceptance, but was completely dedicated to declaring the counsel and will of God. The burden of his message to Israel was that the "Mightier One" who would give the baptism of fire and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and who would be the judge of men's hearts was about to begin His blessed work (3:10-12). John emphasized the superior greatness of the One who was to come. He alone would bring about the eternal separation of men into two classes—the repentant wheat and the unrepentant chaff. John's ministry was to end Jesus' obscurity. It was also to prepare the hearts of the Israelites for Jesus' appearance and message.

When God's hour arrived for the Son of Man to become a public figure, Jesus left Galilee to meet John. Jesus was to reveal Himself to chosen witnesses as the divine Son of God so that they would be certain that He really was God's servant chosen to redeem men from the curse of sin. This text for Epiphany is the record of how the Father and the Holy Spirit confirmed the deity, the majesty, and the glory which Jesus of Nazareth possessed from eternity but which was concealed in His incarnation.

I

The evangelists are silent about the things that happened in Jesus' life from the age of twelve till He came to John with the request to be baptized. During these formative years, Jesus remained in Galilee.

V. 13. Matthew introduces this account with *τότε* to connect this narrative with *ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις* in 3:1. Jesus came

(παράγινεται) to fulfill the divine purpose in His life. The τοῦ with the infinitive expresses the purpose while the aorist signifies a definite complete action. Jesus came to "be baptized" by John the Baptist. Why did Jesus come to John to be baptized? Jesus recognized that John's baptism was from heaven (21:25). Jesus wanted to fulfill God's demands directed toward man. Baptism was one of them. He wanted to fulfill all righteousness.

In His baptism He revealed Himself as the hope and the fulfillment of the Old Testament Israel which had "passed through the waters of the Red Sea." He pointed forward to His own death (Luke 12:50). He anticipated the sacrament of life in which we die, are united with Him, and rise again to newness of life.

II

Vv. 14, 15 are not found in the accounts of the other synoptists. Matthew supplies details which are helpful to a better understanding of why Jesus wanted to be baptized.

John was not ready to meet Jesus' request for baptism. He tried to prevent (διεκώλυεν) Jesus from being baptized. One suggested meaning is "to hinder earnestly." John then explains why he was reluctant to satisfy Jesus' request. John felt the need or necessity (χρεία) to be baptized by Jesus whose perfection and holiness he recognized. There was great surprise on his part that Jesus had come to him, expressed so well by "and You, You come to me?" (καὶ σὺ ἔρχῃ πρὸς μέ;) His reaction is similar to that of Peter who objected to Jesus' intention to wash his feet (John 13:6). J. B. Phillips: "Surely you do not come to me?"

In His reply Jesus reveals Himself to John. "Let it be so immediately" (ἄφες ἄρτι). The 2d person 2d aorist imperative is rare. Jesus then gives the reason, "For thus it is proper for us that all righteousness be fulfilled." "Righteousness" (δικαιοσύνην) is used in the sense of meeting the requirements of the

divine statutes. John's baptism was sanctioned by God; therefore, Jesus felt the need of submitting to it willingly. Since Jesus was divinely conceived, He was born sinless and holy. There was no need for Him to repent of sin. Why then did He insist on baptism at the hands of John? To demonstrate that, what God ordains as right and proper for men, Jesus also wants to do. This action was a declaration by Jesus of His readiness to be the Savior of the world. This was Jesus' personal revelation to John that He was the real Messiah. Jesus manifested to John that He really was the Son of the Father.

Jesus' explanation is accepted by John. The present tense (ἀφίησον) indicates a prompt response. For John there was no need for further explanation. He would meet Jesus' request.

III

When Jesus came from the water, He noticed that the heavens were opened. Mark expresses this more graphically with the participle (σχιζομένουσ) "the heavens being split." Only one other such a phenomenon is reported in the New Testament: when Stephen was stoned (Acts 7:56). In both instances only one individual was able to see the remarkable vision presented. God wanted to reveal something special to His Son. The heavens had not been opened in this way since the days of the prophets. Ezekiel (1:1) asserts, for example, that his call as a prophet came when the heavens were opened and he saw visions of God.

As confirmation of His baptism Jesus saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove. A word of Isaiah (11:2) was being fulfilled. The Spirit of God had not been absent from Jesus' life till now, but He appeared in a vision to symbolize that He would be accompanying Jesus throughout His ministry as the Savior of the world. This vision must have stirred Jesus inwardly and awakened Him to a greater consciousness of His office

as the appointed Messiah. This appearance of the Spirit was Jesus' ordination into His office (Luke 3:22). The Spirit's coming did not change Jesus' moral character, but it did set Him apart for the divine service He had come to earth to render.

IV

The voice from heaven (v. 17) was the voice from God. The message of this day was repeated and amplified on the mount of transfiguration (Matt. 17:5; Luke 9:35, 36). Jesus again heard the voice from heaven during Holy Week, though those surrounding Him did not hear what was said (John 12:28-30). What Jesus hears are words of Old Testament scripture. "This is My beloved Son," a reference to Ps. 2:7. "My beloved Son" (ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός) — this is the title which God Himself gave to Jesus. It shows the nearness of Jesus' relation to the Father, and the Father's love for Him (Heb. 1:2). God testifies that His Son

is His equal, that He is "very God of very God." Jesus is called "Son" as the expression of God's regard for Him. "Beloved" is a Messianic title. "In whom I take pleasure" is a reference from Isaiah (42:1). Isaiah deals with the servant of Jehovah who is the Messiah. By the use of this expression Jesus is certified as the chosen Savior whom the Father has identified as His Son. It is an expression of the Father's approval and satisfaction with what Jesus has just done in being baptized and in revealing Himself to John. Jesus was strengthened for the task ahead.

As an Epiphany text this account of Jesus' baptism is most appropriate. It offers the preacher the opportunity to emphasize the three-fold manifestation to the person of Jesus Christ — the personal testimony of Jesus' word, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the approving voice of the Father.

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